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December 14, 2004  
Immediate Release

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## **United Nuclear Corporation Proposes Ground Water Investigations at Two Northwestern New Mexico Uranium Mines**

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) has received proposals for ground water investigations at two United Nuclear Corporation (UNC) uranium mines in Northwestern New Mexico. UNC operated the North East Church Rock (NECR) uranium mine northeast of Gallup and the Section 27 uranium mine north of Grants. Neither mine is currently in operation.

The NECR mine is located approximately 16 miles northeast of Gallup. The mine operated from 1968 to 1982. During mining operations, UNC operated under a mineral lease with the predecessors of what is now Newmont Gold Corporation, who is the current owner of the mineral estate. Surface ownership of the mine area is held in trust by the federal government for the Navajo Nation.

The Section 27 mine is located approximately 35 miles north of Grants. The mine operated from 1970 to 1977. During mining operations, UNC operated under a mineral lease with the predecessors of what is now Hecla Mining Company, who is the current owner of the mineral estate. Surface ownership of the mine area is held by Mr. Kent Schmitt.

New Mexico water quality regulations require responsible parties to remediate ground water pollution. The first step in this process is the submission of a Stage 1 abatement plan assessing ground water quality. In this case, NMED has received Stage 1 plans for both mine sites.

These activities are required by NMED since past ground water sampling has indicated that pollutant concentrations exceed New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission standards. Samples at the NECR mine have shown elevated levels of total dissolved solids, boron and high pH. Section 27 samples indicate elevated levels of uranium, total dissolved solids and sulfate. Soil sampling is also required for the waste piles that may directly or indirectly impact ground water. There has been very limited site assessment work conducted at these sites to date.

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The public will have an opportunity to comment on the next stage, Stage 2, of the abatement plan, which will include a proposal for cleaning up any contamination that is discovered during the Stage 1 assessment. Public comment will be sought by NMED within 90 days of the cleanup plan being received by NMED.

For additional information, contact Jerry Schoeppner, Geologist, NMED Ground Water Quality Bureau, at (505) 827-0652, or Jon Goldstein, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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